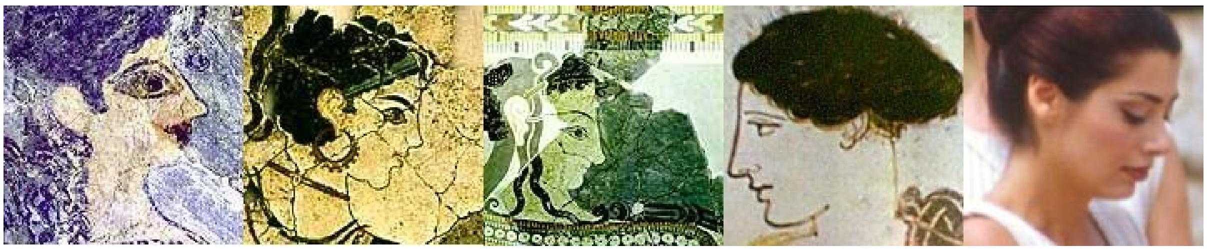
Racial Type of the Ancient Hellenes

by Dienekes Pontikos



Greek women through the ages: Minoan, Cycladic, Mycenaean, Classical, Modern

INTRODUCTION

This essay attempts a critical evaluation of the extant evidence about the racial type of the Ancient Greeks. It is in part an anthropological study in its own right, and in part a response to those, especially of the Nordicist school, who claim that the Ancient Greeks were physically different from the modern ones. If it sometimes appears that too much effort is spent in convincing the reader of simple enough points, it is because of my desire not to let any of the arguments of people holding different views unchallenged.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Early anthropologists commonly believed that the Hellenes belonged principally to the Mediterranean(a) race. This was the view shared by Sergi [1] and Ripley [2]. In a more recent study of the problem of Race, John R. Baker in [5] says that later studies "do not appear to have disproved" these views. Buxton in [3] shares this general view, although he observes that brachycephals(b) were a part of the Greek population from the beginning and that the Greeks were a mix of Alpine(c) and Mediterranean people from a "comparatively early date." The American anthropologist Coon in [4] agrees when he asserts that the Greeks are an Alpine/Mediterranean mix, with a weak Nordic(d) component, being "remarkably similar" to their ancient ancestors.

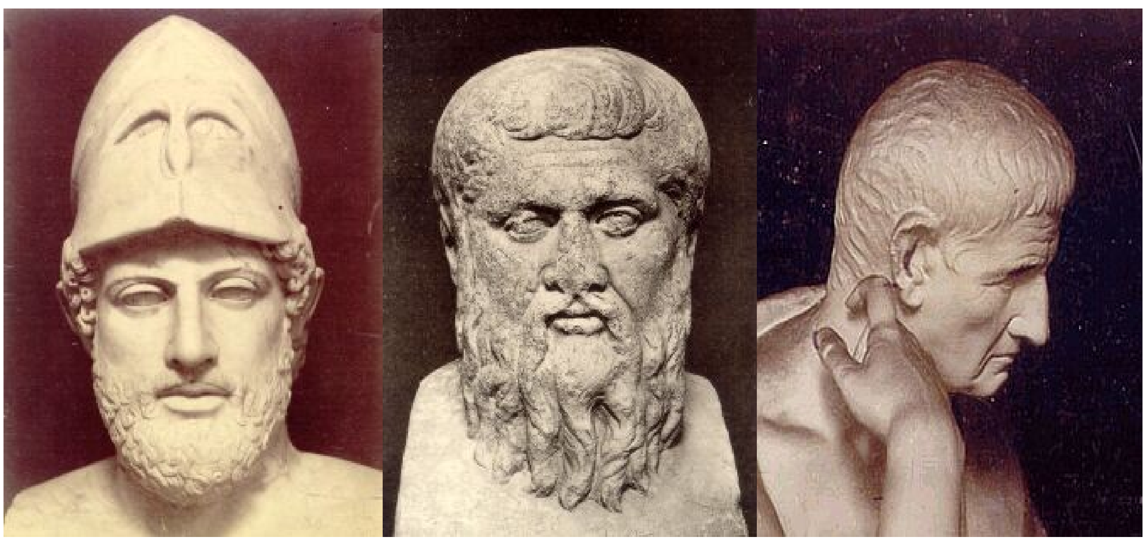
The most complete study of Greek skeletal material from Neolithic to modern times was carried out by American anthropologist J. Lawrence Angel [6] who found that in the early age racial variability in Greece was 7% above average, indicating that the Greeks had multiple origins within the Europid racial family. Angel noted that from the earliest times to the present "racial continuity in Greece is striking." Buxton [30] who had earlier studied Greek skeletal material and measured modern Greeks, especially in Cyprus, finds that the modern Greeks "possess physical characteristics not differing essentially from those of the former [ancient Greeks]."

The most extensive study of modern Greeks has been carried by the Greek anthropologist Aris N. Poulianos [10,11]. Poulianos' study included the collection and study of more than seventy anthropometric measurements from a large sample of thousands of Greeks from different parts of the country. His main conclusions are that both Greeks and their neighboring populations are basically a

mixture of Aegeans (a Mediterranean type local to the area) and Epirotics (Dinarics[(e)]) and are descended from the ancient inhabitants of the lands in which they live. The presence of individuals which approximate the Nordic subrace is minimal, and does not exceed 4-6% even in the most depigmented groups of Greece. More frequent are individuals which approximate the Alpine race of Central Europe. These reach up to 20-30% of some groups and are often blended with more southern racial types.

Nikolaos Xirotiris [37], more recently, surveyed Greek skeletal material and a number of genetical and anthropometrical studies on modern Greeks. His discoveries were that like in antiquity, the Greek terrain which favors isolation, has led to the formation of local types by micro-evolution. He too concludes racial continuity in Greece, not finding traces of any significant alteration of the Greek racial complex, from prehistory, through classical and medieval, to modern times.

The American anthropologist Roland Dixon studied the funeral masks of Spartans and found them to be Alpine [23]. Italian anthropologist Raffaello Battaglia found the death masks of the Shaft Grave Mycenaeans to represent Dinaric physiognomies [35]. J. Lawrence Angel expressed similar opinions in that he believed that northern intruders in Greece were always of "Dinaroid-Alpine central trend" [19] added to the earlier Mediterranean/Alpine blend. Racial elements were not separate but combined to produce Greek civilization [19]. Finally, a more recent statistical comparison [18] of ancient and modern Greek skulls resulted in the discovery of "a remarkable similarity in craniofacial morphology between modern and ancient Greeks."



Examples of Ancient Greek types: "Mediterranean": Pericles, 5th c. BC statesman, narrow-faced and fine-featured; "Alpine": Plato, 4th c. BC philosopher, broad-faced and broad-headed; "Dinaric": Aristippos, 4th c. BC philosopher, short and high-headed, salient nose

Baker [5] discusses the origin of blondism and says "It is often supposed that blondness is an indication of Nordid ancestry. Taken by itself, it is nothing of the kind." Hence, it can be safely assumed that the existence of blond individuals in the Classical world does not require an explanation of Northern ancestry, as German anthropologist Hans Guenther [15] and the Nordicist school presumed. This view was shared by Buxton in [3] where he states "In regard to the Achaeans we have shown that there appears to be no good ground for suspecting the presence of Nordics." F.G. Debets expresses a similar opinion [32] when he states that "In the Bronze Age, we generally find the same types as in the modern population, with different distribution. We cannot speak of miscegenation with the Nordic race." With regard to the modern Greeks Buxton says [30] "the evidence of blue eyes is certainly insufficient to establish their [Nordics'] presence as a significant element in the population." Carleton Coon [14] also

cautions against ascribing blonde elements in Mediterranean populations to “some invasion of Goths or Scyths, or the miscegenation of Crusaders,” noting that “one of the characteristics of the Mediterranean race is a minority tendency to blondism.” Coon warns that “we cannot be sure that all prehistoric skeletal material which seems Nordic in an osteological sense was associated with blond soft parts” [4]. The same view is echoed by Angel [6] who states with respect to the Nordic-Iranian morphological type that “There is no reason to suppose that the Nordic-Iranian type in Greece was as blond as are Nordics in northern latitudes.” Moreover The Alpine race (prevalent in much of continental Europe) has an even greater occurrence of blondism and frequently gray eyes [2]. W. W. Howells of Harvard University also notes [48] that “Not all ‘Nordics’ are blond, and not all blonds are ‘Nordic,’ by any means.” American anthropologist Earnest Hooton [40] cautions that the existence of occasional blonds in Greek literature “does not justify inflation into pseudo-histories of conquering ‘Nordic’ tribes invading the Greek peninsula.” American anthropologist W. M. Krogman put it simply [36]: “Nordics today have not cornered the market on blondism!”

Coon [4], based on a sample of 113 Greeks measured in Boston linked the presence of the weak blond component (<5%) present in Greeks with Nordic origin, mainly due to its linkage with an absence of eyebrow concurrency. No such correlation emerges in Poulianos’ [10] sample from different regions, which exceeds 3,000 individuals. Note also, that the blondest Greek group (Macedonia) has a cephalic index of 83.08, higher than the Greek average. Like in Italy [4], blondism in Greece is slightly correlated with broader heads. The opposite would be expected if it was Nordic in origin.

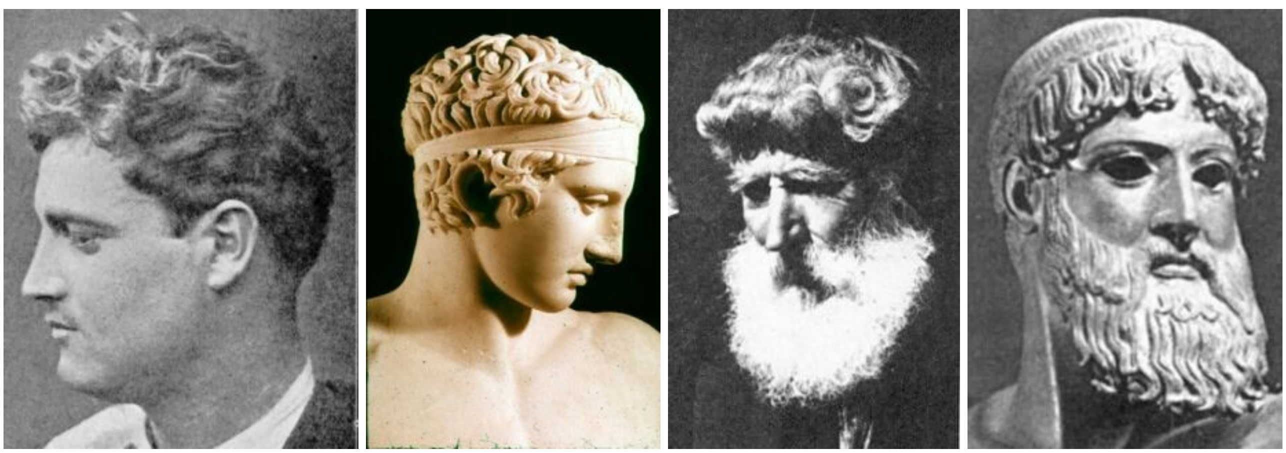
In conclusion, it is most likely that the minority blonde element in Greece is not necessarily associated with historical migrations. It is also true that the introduction of northern strains to the Greek population in various times from pre-history to recent times may have introduced more blond elements.



Examples of Modern Greek types: These modern Greeks were classified by J. Lawrence Angel [38] as belonging to each of the six morphological types of the Ancient Greeks. First row: Basic White, Classic Mediterranean; Second row: Nordic-Iranian, Dinaric-Mediterranean; Third row: Mixed Alpine, Alpine

LITERARY EVIDENCE

It is sometimes mentioned that ancient literature provides evidence for the significant existence of Nordics in ancient Hellas. It does nothing of the kind. There are numerous references to brunets in ancient mythology and literature, e.g., the Muses, Poseidon, Alcmena, Theseus, Zeus, Dionysos and Odysseus are described as possessing either dark hair or dark eyes. Hercules, the Greeks' favorite hero is described as dark (*melanan*), hook-nosed (*grupon*) by Dicaearchus (Clement of Alexandria, "Protreptic to the Greeks" 2.30.7). Hercules was also proverbially *melampugos* (having a black behind) as indicative of his bravery, as opposed to *pugargos* (having a white behind), a coward [29]. The Greek poetess Sappho (an aristocrat from the isle of Lesbos in the 7th c. BC) reveals that both she and her mother were dark (Fr. 98a, line 11). Philoktetes and Aias were also both brunet-skinned and black-haired (Malalas, Chronogr. 104, 3-8). We must also not neglect to mention the detailed analysis of classicist Denys Page [26] who, in agreement with the ancient testimony of Callimachus (Fr. 299.1) demonstrates that the epithet *elikôpes*, collectively used for the Homeric Achaeans, probably meant "dark-eyed," rather than "with rolling eyes" as it was erroneously thought. Eleanor Irwin, who wrote the definitive work on color terms in Greek poetry [29] agrees with this opinion, and so does Noel Robertson who summarizes [45] current opinion as follows: "it is clear that the meaning 'black' is well-founded, whereas 'rolling' or 'twisting' rests on a misunderstanding of various compounds." Finally, some personages (e.g., Theseus and Dionysos) are portrayed in Greek literature sometimes as blond (Euripides) and sometimes as brunet (Hesiod), indicating that there was not a uniform belief about their pigmentation. The second most popular Greek hero, Theseus, founder of Athens was dark-eyed (Bacchylides 17.16-19).



Greek Men: Greek from Tinos, circa 1911; Greek sculpture of "Diadoumenos," circa 430BC; Old Cretan Man; Poseidon of Artemision

A certain measure of naivete can excuse claims of the alleged blondeness of the ancient Greeks. Sometimes, the common-sense explanation of literary descriptions is conveniently discounted, and a generalization from sporadic references to blondes in ancient literature is performed without much thought. In an oft-used example, Orestes' hair is described as fair, in Sophocles' Electra as a dramatic device aiding Electra's recognition of her brother from a lock of his hair on her father Agamemnon's tomb. Clearly, if Orestes was depicted as brunet, the common Greek color, it would be impossible for Electra to identify him. Similarly, Demeter, the goddess of the corn is described as light-haired (*xanthe*) and so is Apollo, the god of light and the sun. Poseidon, the sea god is dark-haired (*kuanochaites*), as is Hades, god of the underworld, while Eos, the Dawn goddess is rosy-fingered (*rhododaktylos*).

There are all but four mortals in the Iliad who are described as *xanthoi*. From this scanty evidence, the generalization "the Achaeans were blonde" is arrived by the Nordicists. Does the absence of

descriptions of brunets signify that there were no brunets in the southernmost extremity of Europe in Mycenaean times? Clearly, such a thesis overlooks the common use of color terms as distinctive attributes of their possessors. It is more reasonable to think that Menelaos and Achilleus are described as *xanthoi*, while *hundreds of other heroes are not* as indicative that these two possessed a trait which was otherwise uncommon, i.e., light pigmentation of hair. The same can be said for light eyes as well, and e.g., Athena's light eyes caused the scorn of Hera and Aphrodite in a text by Hyginus who presumably did not have such eyes (Hyginus, Fabulae, Marsyas).

We must also dispel the notion that *xanthos* always refers to yellow hair, or that *purros* refers to purely red hair. For the former, we note that Aristophanes used *xanthizein* to describe roasting meat, which of course does not turn yellow. Additionally, Strabo uses *xanthotrichein* and *leukotrichein* (making hair *xanthon* and making hair "white") indicating that *xanthon* was a darker shade than extremely fair hair. George Cedrenus uses it to describe the eyes of the Virgin (*xanthommaton*); eyes are rarely yellow, unless jaundiced, which seems unlikely in this case. In modern Greek it may be used to describe any color short of black [22]. In ancient Greek, according to Barbara Fowler [28] was any color short of black or dark brown, while Wace [22] believes that it may have been at most auburn. Color terms are notoriously relative; *xanthos* may only be taken to mean the fair end of the Greek hair continuum, not blond. This impression is enhanced by the descriptions of northern European hair as *polios* (gray, usually of old people) or *leukon* (white) to be found in Greek literature (Diodorus Siculus, Adamantius Judaeus).

As for *purros* it is noteworthy that the common Greek words for fiery red *eruthros* is not employed for hair, while *purros* is given by Aelius Herodianus (Partitiones 115, 10) for the color of eyes. Human eyes are never red, or so-called strawberry blond, but they are often of a brown tint mixed with red. It is certain that at least in some cases, reddish brown is intended, while in others, as e.g., in describing German hair, reddish blond may be appropriate, given the known pigmentation of Germans. It must also be remembered that no ethnic taxon of man is recorded as being primarily red-headed. Therefore, *purros* means having a red tinge, it does not mean redhead.

It would be worthwhile to quote here in full, the opinion of British anthropologist John Beddoe [34]. Beddoe studied thousands of Britons and continental Europeans, and comparing his designations with that of other observers, came to realize the relativity of color terms:

> *Thus almost all French anthropologists say that the majority of persons in the north of France are blond; whereas almost all Englishmen would say they were dark, each set of observers setting up as a standard what they are accustomed to see around them when at home. What is darkish brown to most Englishmen would be chestnut in the nomenclature of most Parisians, and perhaps even blond in that of Auvergne or Provence; an ancient Roman might probably have called it sufflavus or even flavus.*

ARTISTIC EVIDENCE

Greek art furnishes important information about the racial type of the ancient Hellenes. Coon in [4] observed that the beauty ideal of a straight nose and a lithe body was borrowed from Minoan Crete which was undisputably peopled by Mediterraneans [5,11]. The characteristic nose-forehead continuity of idealistic depictions of gods and heroes is more typical of Mediterraneans than Nordics [5], although it was rare for ancient Greeks [6] as it is for modern ones [10]. Angel [6] observes though, that his Dinaric-Mediterranean (Type F) morphological type approaches this ideal, in contrast to the Nordic-Iranian (Type D) in which the nasal bone projects at a sharp angle with the frontal bone. Indeed, Bertil Lundman, who claimed to have studied more than 20,000 individuals anthropologically [49], remarked

that “the morphology of the Northlander must be assumed to be sufficiently known; it is necessary to stress only that a high nose bridge with a so-called Greek profile always points to foreign admixture.” Thus, the Greek profile is seen as evidence of the “Northern” character of the Ancient Greeks, yet a real expert on northern physical anthropology acknowledges that it is foreign to the Northern morphological type.



Greek Gods: Apollo (Athenian kylix, 480-470BC); Zeus (Olympia, 470BC); Demeter (3rd c. BC)

Statues sometimes show traces of pigmentation; this includes different pigment types and is not uniform, representing the different hair colors among Greeks. Manzelli in a study of polychromatic Archaic Greek statuary [43] records an incidence of only 2% of yellow hair.[f] Manzelli also records that eye colors were black, “red,” and brown in the majority of surviving examples, with only a single example having green eyes. Mary Stieber [47] who studied the appearance of archaic statues of young women called *korai* also concludes that despite the presence of light hair in some examples, “it remains a fact that yellow hair is a rarity; for this reason alone it is tempting to infer that the percentage of its occurrence in female statues on the Acropolis is largely a reflection of its occurrence in real life.” Buxton in [3] records an interesting fact observed by Sergi [1], Ripley [2], and Deniker [27] and the Greek anthropologist Klon Stephanos. A quote from Ripley (p.410) “these ideal heads [of the statues] are distinctly brachycephalic.” Importantly, various populations in modern Hellas who are suspected by some (for historical and linguistic reasons) to represent a relatively pure Hellenic type, the Sphakiots and Maniates are also brachycephalic. Ancient Greeks were, however, on average mesocephalic [6].

The German art historian, Winckelmann [16] discusses extensively the Greek beauty ideal. The low forehead, luxurious curly hair, straight nose in continuity to the nose, large eyes and ovoid faces described by the author are typical of Southern Europe, contrasting with the small eyes, high forehead, angular features and straight hair typical of more northern climes. Winckelmann observes the similarity of modern Greeks, particularly from the islands to the classical forms, relating in particular that the Greek women of Chios are the “most beautiful of the human race.”

Winckelmann's impressions are supported by a modern study by Farkas et al. [51], according to which 20% of modern Greek males have a forehead (tragion to nasion) that is lower than the normal range of white Americans, who are mostly of northwestern European descent; The lowness of the forehead was also typical of ancient Greeks [6]. The same study discovered that 50% of Greek males and 16.7% of Greek females have an eye fissure length greater than the normal range of white Americans.

Greek pottery cannot be used directly for determining pigmentation, because most of it is bi-chromatic. It is interesting though, that in the more realistic red-figure vases, the hair is almost always painted black, creating a great contrast with the body which is white (numerous examples in [24]). In white

background lekythoi, realistic colors are used. Extreme blondness, typical of Nordic individuals is almost completely absent while many examples have hair that is black or a dark brown. Reddish brown is also present. Martin F. Kilmer, in [7: p.131, n.4] in discussing an Etruscan vase showing a blond woman says that this is “not a common Greek feature.” Thus, while examples of blonde hair in Greek art are not unknown (e.g., the Blonde Ephebe of the Acropolis, whose hair is deep yellow [21]), they are not common.

Theater masks also sometimes provide information about human pigmentation; this may be especially important since in theater different character types are given stereotypical features. For example, a 4th c. BC mask of a *hetaira* or courtesan had colour that “seems to have been black for the brows and eyelashes and red for the hair,” while “Good Athenian girls had black hair.” [46] As will be shown below, this agrees with the ancient literary evidence which disparages hair lightening as unfit for wise women.



Examples from Greek Art: An Athenian woman; A Greek man from Tarentum; A Greek woman from Paestum; A Greek man from Paestum

Unlike statuary and pottery, most Ancient Greek painting has not survived. Fortunately, Greek originals were copied by the Romans, and several frescoes with themes from life and mythology have survived in Pompeii and Herculaneum. These were buried under tons of volcanic ashes and have been brought back, almost intact, by modern archaeology. In all scenes, men and women are given the familiar features known from the plastic arts, and are painted with vivid colors. Eyes are uniformly brown, and hair ranges from a lightish brown to black. The frescoes of Pompeii are particularly valuable because they show a virtual roster of ancient Greek heroes, indicating how these were imagined by the Greek mind.

EVIDENCE FOR THE APPEARANCE OF GREEKS AND NON-GREEKS

The Greek authors themselves never made a direct statement concerning their own racial type. It was however recognized that the Greeks were darker than the northern people whose paleness and blondness is contrasted in numerous authors with the swarthiness of the Egyptians and Ethiopians. The Hellenes believed that they represented the Golden Mean in terms of appearance. It is safe to assume that they were generally darker than Northern Europeans and lighter than Egyptians. Even the Thracians to their north are usually depicted in Greek pottery with “the same dark hair and the same facial features as the Greeks” [9], although in some cases they are depicted as fair as well. This agrees with Poulianos’ [10] pronouncement that the Thracians like the modern Bulgarians belonged mainly to the Aegean anthropological type. [9] also gives the telling example of a neck amphora on exhibit at the Getty Museum in which the Homeric scene of the Achaean raid on the Trojan camp by Odysseus and

Diomedes is portrayed. The Greek heroes have dark hair, while the Thracian allies of the Trojans have light hair.



Greek Heroes from Pompeii: Perseus, Jason, Theseus, Hercules, Achilles

In a very interesting part of his *Histories* (4.108-109), Herodotus describes a Scythian tribe, the Budini as "ruddy," or "red-haired" *purron* and "blue/gray-eyed" *glaukoi*. In their land, exists a city, Gelon, inhabited by the Geloni. While the Budini are nomads, the Geloni are farmers, speak a language that is half-Greek and half-Scythian and worship Greek gods. According to Herodotus, they are Greek colonists who left their sea ports to live inland among the Budini. Interestingly, Herodotus states that the Geloni are like the fair Budini in "neither form nor coloring" [*ouden ten ideen homoioi oude to chroma*].

We must also mention the early testimony of Xenophanes of Colophon (6th c. BC, Fr. 13-14) who shows that people fashion the gods after their own image, and, after ironically saying "if oxen had gods they would be like oxen," again uses the stock example of the *purroi* and *glaukoi* Thracians, contrasted with the pug-nosed (*simoi*) and dark (*melanes*) Ethiopians to show that people fashion their gods after their own image. How odd this must have seemed to his Greek audience if it included a considerable number of Thracian-like individuals!

It would be interesting to quote here in full a passage from the Greek medical writer Galen (Galen, "Mixtures") which contrasts the hair color of different ancient people. Note that "red" in this passage is Greek *purros*, a word with ambiguous meaning.

> *So much for the formation of the hair; we should now pass on to the features of all the incidental features of the mixtures, as regards the differences of hair according to age,*

place, and nature of the body. The hair of Egyptians, Arabs, Indians, and of general all peoples who inhabit hot, dry places, has poor growth and is black, dry, curly and brittle. That of the inhabitants of cold, wet places, conversely - Illyrians, Germans, Dalmatians, Sauromatians, and the Scythian types of people in general- has reasonably good growth and is thin, straight, and red. Those who live in some well-balanced land which is between these in quality have hair with extremely good growth, which is strong, fairly black, moderately thick, and neither completely curly nor completely straight. The differences due to age are analogous to these: with regard to the qualities of strength, thickness, size, and colour, infants' hair is similar to the Germans', hair in the prime of life to the Ethiopians', and that of ephebes and children to the hair of people of well-balanced lands.

It is clear from the preceding passage, that Greeks, who inhabited the "well-balanced lands" possessed mostly hair that was lighter in infancy and "fairly black" in adult life. It is interesting to note that according to Coon [4], 80% of modern Greeks have dark brown hair. The contrast between fair northerners, dark southerners and intermediate Greeks is echoed in too many places in Greek literature to note, an additional example is in Claudius Ptolemaeus Math., Apotelesmatica. Bk 4 ch. 10. Besides color, Galen also mentions that the canon of the Greek sculptor Polyclitus, which governed the proportions of the human body (Galenus Med., De sanitate tuenda libri vi. Kühn volume 6 page 127 line 1) is found mostly in Greek lands:

In our country, as in others of good climate, one may see many bodies similar [to the canon], but in Scythians, Egyptians and Arabs, not even in a dream can one expect to find such a body.

We have already mentioned the testimony of Winckelmann [16] who found classical physiques in modern times in Greek-colonized Southern Italy. We will add that of another German, J.G. Kohl [25] who "found the most beautiful faces and physiques, reminiscent of works by Praxiteles" in 19th c. Greece.

ADAMANTIUS JUDAEUS

An oft-quoted passage from the 4th c. AD Jewish writer Adamantius Judaeus is used to "prove" that the original Greeks were tall, pale, blond and light-eyed. Let us not question, for the sake of argument, the knowledge of Adamantius as to the physical type of early Greek speakers already twenty five centuries in his past. Reproducing the passage in the original Greek reveals that the Greeks were moderately tall men (*autarkôs megaloi andres*), broader, i.e., not linear-bodied (*euruteroi*), with moderately firm flesh (*sarkos krasin echontes metrian eupagesteran*), lighter-skinned (*leukoteroi tên chroan*), with a medium-sized head (*kephalên mesên to megethos*), a strong neck(*trachêlon eurôston*), slightly-curly brown hair (*trichôma hupoxanthon hapalôteron oulon praôs*), a square face, i.e., with a broad jaw and not long (*prosôpon tetragônon*), narrow lips (*cheilê lepta*), straight nose (*rhina orthên*), liquid, "glad," quick eyes full of light (*ophthalmous hugrous charopous gorgous phôs polu echontas en heautois*).

Let us examine this passage critically. Now, it is certain, that if the early "Hellenes" came from northern Greece, being the "descendants of Hellen and his sons" of Thessaly and Pindos, that they would be lighter in terms of pigmentation than the southern Greeks with whom they blended. Even today, in Greece, the inhabitants of the Pindos mountain range, and of northern Greece in general, tend to be lighter-skinned [4, 10]. Adamantius also tells us that they are moderately, not very tall, as he despises both very tall and very low stature. The same principle, common in the Greek physiognomists

applies to their medium sized heads, and their brown hair, not very *xanthê*, whitish (*agan xanthê kai hupoleukos, hopoia Skuthôn kai Keltôn*) as that of Scythians and Celts which for him implies stupidity, awkwardness and savageness (*amathian kai skaiotêta kai agriotêta*). Of the color of the eyes of these Greeks he does not say, most notably he does not say that they were *glaukoi*, i.e., gray-blue, although he does say that this color is found among northern people along with white hair (*leukoi tas komas*) and slack flesh (*sarki lagarâi*), and tall stature (*eumêkeis*).

Adamantius thus distinguishes Greeks from northern (and southern) people in almost every anthropological attribute. They are darker-haired, their eyes are not said to be blue-gray, their flesh is firm (thin skin which wrinkles finely is typical of northern Europe), they are tall, but not *very* tall, and they are also broader, with medium-sized heads, slightly curly not straight hair, etc. It is thus certain, that the Greek race described by Adamantius is not that of northerners (Scythians, Celts) who as we know are themselves only partly of Nordic race.

To finally establish this fact, we turn to anthropology and try to find correlations between Adamantius' description and Greeks. According to Coon [4], Greeks are quite tall for Europeans, as tall as northern Frenchmen, but not as tall as Scandinavians. They are relatively broad and stocky with well-developed musculature, much like their prehistoric ancestors [13]. 90% of them have some sort of brown hair from dark to light inclining to blond. In the Near East, black hair is predominant, while in northern Europe the flaxen shades are more important. 50% have pinkish white skin and the remainder have olive white and light brown skin; few have the ruddy skin despised by Adamantius. The great breadth of the jaw is noted both by Coon as a "a Greek specialty" for the modern Greeks and by Angel [6] for ancient ones. Angel considered it as "the most striking feature of the Greek face". A modern study by Farkas et al. [51] confirms this observation, noting that 53.3% of Greek males and 26.7% of Greek females have a jaw that is wider than the normal range of North American whites. The head size of Greeks is medium, not as large as e.g., Norwegians or Irishmen, but not as small as Near-Eastern people and Africans. Their hair is wavier than northern people, but not as curly as Near-Eastern ones. The nose is straight in the majority but we concede that the beauty of their eyes cannot be quantified or proven. In all other repsects, the Greeks are a close match for Adamantius' Greeks.

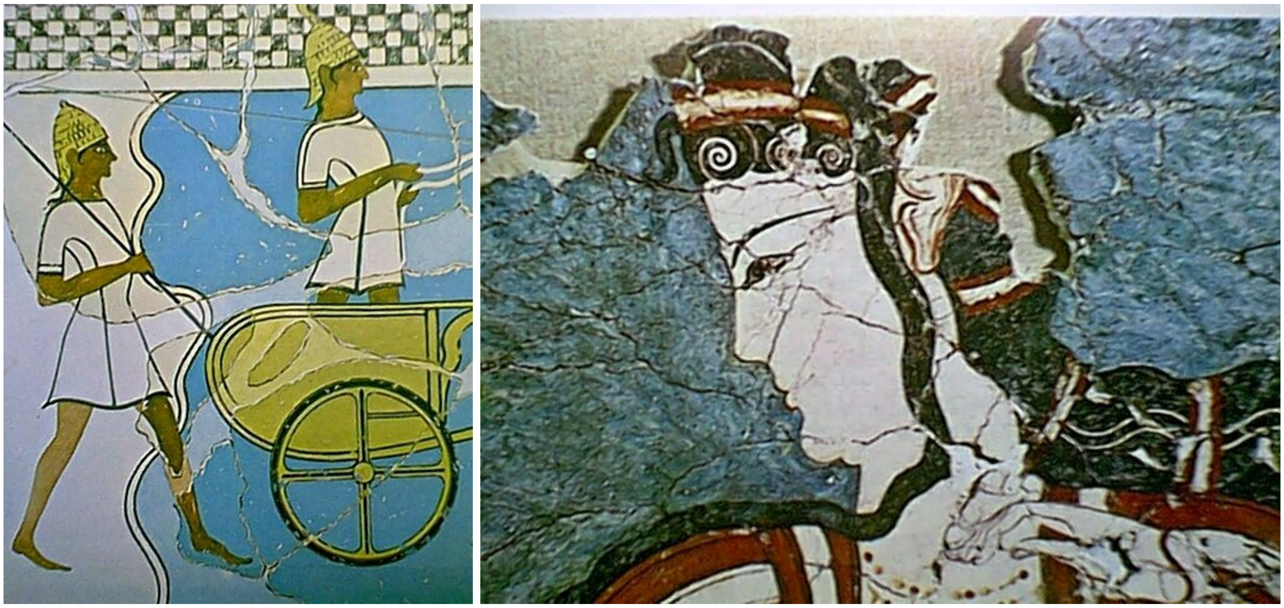
CLASS DIFFERENCES IN PHYSIQUE?

It is sometimes maintained that the Greek citizens were of a different physical type than their slaves. This is inaccurate. Greek slaves were either of Greek origin or from neighboring lands. Some slaves from more distant lands probably existed as well, both relatively fairer (Scythians) and darker (Syrians). But on the whole, in Classical Athens at the height of its power, citizens were indistinguishable physically from metics and slaves, according to the Old Oligarch's "Constitution of the Athenians" (written between 446-424BC) [8]:

> *If the law permitted a free man to strike a slave or freedman, he would often find that he had mistaken an Athenian for a slave and struck him, for, so far as clothing and general appearance are concerned, the common people* [ho demos] *look just the same as the slaves and metics.*

Some have even argued that thousands of Middle-Easterners were granted Athenian citizenship during the Peloponesian War (post-411BC) because of the shortage of manpower caused by that conflict. Such a suggestion is little more than an invention of its authors, for the only exhaustive study, by the Hungarian scholar Gyorgy Nemeth [17] on the foreign-born residents ("metics") up to 400BC in Athens which studied *all* such people whose identity is known from literature, tombstones and a variety of other sources reveals that most of them were from the Delian League (hence Greeks), or from Greek

city-states close to Athens (Megara, Corinth), while the most distant point of origin was Syracuse in Sicily.



Examples from Mycenaean Greek Art: Chariot scene; Female figure

A similar argument suggests that the "original" Greeks were fair, but they mixed with the darker inhabitants of Greece. The first people known to be Greek were the Mycenaeans. British archaeologist Oliver Dickinson noted that in Mycenaean art, virtually all people are drawn with dark hair and eyes [42] like ancient and modern Greeks:

> *Frescoes normally show eyes and hair as dark (one girl in the Xeste 3 fresco has reddish hair), skin conventionally as red-brown on males and white on females, as in Egypt. All are comparable with the colouring used on later Greek statues and paintings, and suggest that the early populations were similar in complexion and colouring to the ancient, and indeed the modern, Greeks, whom they might equally have resembled in variety of physical type.*

Moreover, the burials at the Royal Graves of Mycenae, c. 1600BC [12] show a variety of stature and head form representing multiple subracial types. Thus, it is safe to assume that from earliest times, the Greek aristocracy didn't belong to a particular physical type. The main difference between aristocrats and commoners was the slightly larger size of the former, which he explains as due to better diet and social selection for positions of leadership in warfare. That the Mycenaean aristocrats were racially similar to the common Greeks was also confirmed by a more recent multi-dimensional analysis of several East Mediterranean skeletal samples by Musgrave and Evans [41]. They found that "these Bronze Age Greeks from Attica and the Argolid [Mycenaean aristocrats] belonged to a single, homogeneous population."

The burials at Lerna [13] from the 3rd millennium onwards may represent a fusion of Greek and non-Greek speakers. Likewise, single tombs or clan tombs contain multiple racial types, discrediting the notion of a racially distinct aristocratic caste. Angel who sought to study the biological component of Greek achievement, by observing this heterogeneity rightfully, dismissed the claim of German Nordicist Hans F K Guenther [20] as "absurd" [19], warning against "such bogeys as 'Nordic Superiority'" [31] underlying them. German anthropologist Ilse Schwidetzky [33] also warns that "associating cultural decline with denordization is an extremely rash and petty conclusion." Angel [19] observes that criminals, who must have been drawn from the lower social strata and regular Athenians

do not differ in physique. The American historian Chester G. Starr summarized the "evidence" of the Nordicist theory thus [50]:

> *Nowhere in historic times is there any valid evidence that the upper classes of one area differed in culture from those of another because of racial background, nor within any one people did the upper and lower classes have basically different cultural inheritances. Modern assertions that the masters preserved a Nordic outlook and so were more capable of culture are pure nonsense, bred of modern racial prejudice, not of the ancient evidence.*

MORE LITERARY EVIDENCE

Aristotle in his Physics defines graying as the process by which hair turns from dark to grey, furnishing some evidence that the Hellenes had usually a dark hair color. The author of *Aristotelis Physiognomica* claims that both excessive paleness and excessive swarthiness are indicative of cowardice. Aristotle in the Eudemian Ethics mentions that "some men are blue eyed (glaukoi) and others black eyed (melanommatoi) because a particular part of them is of a particular quality" without assigning any moral superiority on either of the types. In the same passage, he continues that the blue-eyed man (glaukos) does not see clearly, an error which illustrates that he did not believe in a superiority of blue-eyed individuals. Indeed, the Greeks in general were somewhat repulsed by blue eyes, because of their rarity and association with disease (cataract and glaucoma), as [39], a complete study of all the uses of the adjective (*glaukos*) shows:

> *Instinctive fear of blindness must be very strong among all sighted human beings, so their immediate reaction to such an eye will manifest itself in a repulsive frisson. Men will wish to ward off a similar fate from themselves. Healthy eyes of that colour therefore have something unnatural about them, and their relative infrequence in Greece proper (and, indeed, in Crete), will have aroused a similar instinctive hostility. Fear of the unknown and of the unusual would contribute to the notion that possessors of such eyes must be malign; hence the long association of blue and the Evil Eye which has lasted in Greece and the surrounding area until modern times. Not surprisingly, these feelings of hostility would be strengthened by knowledge that foreigners from the cold North - those dangerous, incursive, un-Greek people - had blue eyes.*

The author of Aristotle's *On Colours* mentions that infants are born with light-colored hair but their hair turns to black as they grow up. Hence, unlike Nordics who retain (to some degree) the paedomorphic trait of blondness, Hellenes appear to possess mostly dark hair in adult life.

There are a number of references in the Greek authors in the practice of women dyeing their hair blond (e.g., in Euripides) or using artificial means (white lead) to lighten their complexion. This is taken by some as a pursuit of a "Nordic ideal." When we read in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* that:

> *Another woman has eyebrows too light: they paint them with lamp-black. Still another, as it happens, is too dark: she plasters herself over with white lead. One has a complexion too white: she rubs on rouge.*



Greek Women: Girl from Ipati, Greece, circa 1930; Head of a female Lapith from the scene of the Battle of the Centaurs on the temple of Zeus at Olympia (Photos by Nelly's, Benaki Museum); Minoan and modern Greek Woman

Are we to infer that lamp-black eyebrows are valued because of a "Nordic ideal?" Women have always lightened their hair because light hair is associated with youth among Caucasoid people, whose hair darkens in adult life. Indeed, the evidence suggests that Greeks were naturally dark-haired, otherwise they would not require hair lightening products. When Menander says (4th c.BC) speaks to an Athenian audience, saying that "*the wise woman will not lighten her hair*" is there any doubt that the practice was not seen favorably in that society? Similarly, Euripides (5th c. BC, Fr. 322) disparages hair lightening: "*Eros is idle, and was born from idlers. It loves mirrors and dyeing hair* [xanthismata]*, but avoids efforts.*" And what of the use of the curling iron, as Nordics have relatively straighter hair than the people of Southern Europe and the Middle East? In this vein, one must remember that Aphrodite is described as *xanthe* in some authors, but is commonly depicted as brunette in Greek art, while Phryne, the famed courtesan whose beauty was renowned in antiquity, earned her nickname (*phryne*=toad [52]) from her dark complexion: the same Phryne chosen by Praxiteles as a model for a statue of the goddess.

Another argument proposed by Nordicists is that because the Greeks used the word *iris*, usually used for the rainbow, to describe the iris of the eye, it follows that they could not be a dark-eyed people. This argument fails for three reasons. First, light eyes are not uncommon in Greece at all. They are not the norm, but they are not unusual. Most Greeks have dark eyes, but a considerable number has mixed eye shades, while pure light eyes occur in varying frequency between 2 to 10% [10]. Second, the word *iris* was only introduced into the Greek language in the late 2nd c. AD (Julius Pollux Gramm., Onomasticon Bk 2 sect. 70 line 3). It is thus not a product of the early Greeks who supposedly saw light eyes all around them and named their irises after the rainbow. Third, the much earlier name for the iris of the eye was "the black" (*to melan*) according to Aristotle's 4th c. BC testimony (*Historia Animalium*, 419b, 21).

Plato, in the *Republic* mentions that statues' eyes should be painted black so that they will have the appearance of eyes, and not some exotic color. He continues that by painting eyes in proportion (i.e., black) and all other parts of the body in proportion, then the result is "beautiful." Hence, it will appear that Plato did not find any fault with dark eyes, he believed them to be beautiful and proposed that statues be painted naturally, i.e., with black eyes.

In the *Republic*, Plato presents direct evidence that blondness might be admired for its beauty, but "dark" [*melanas*] men are of manly aspect:

> *One, because his nose is tip tilted, you will praise as piquant, the beak of another you*

> *pronounce right royal, the intermediate type you say strikes the harmonious mean,the swarthy are of manly aspect, the white are children of the gods divinely fair, and as for honey hued, do you suppose the very word is anything but the euphemistic invention of some lover who can feel no distaste for sallowness when it accompanies the blooming time of youth?*

From this passage it is clear that Plato (who was an Athenian aristocrat and belonged one of the more conservative Athenian families) once again iterates the doctrine of the Mean: The most beautiful ones are the possessors of straight noses (neither concave nor convex) and the possessors of honey-colored skin, neither too pale nor swarthy. Incidentally, the type he seems to prefer is indeed the Greek type par excellence, and the most common type in modern Hellas as well.

CONCLUSIONS

We summarize our conclusions:

- Physical anthropology indicates racial continuity in Greece, with main Dinaric-Alpine-Mediterranean racial elements. Racial type of aristocrats, commoners and criminals is the same.
- Greek literature furnishes evidence of brunet and fair individuals, as today, without ascribing any superiority to either type.
- Greek art shows a predominance of brunet types, with a small minority of fair ones, rarely as fair as northern Europeans and with the same physique as their brunet counterparts.
- Greek descriptions of themselves and others indicate that they were intermediate in pigmentation to northern and southern barbarians, as they are today.

ENDNOTES

(a) The *Mediterranean* type is characterized by dark hair and eyes, skin that tans easily, a long skull, a relatively narrow face and nose and a lean body build. This type is believed to be associated with the creators of the first civilizations in the Fertile Crescent of the Near East. It admits to many subtypes, due to its wide geographical range, from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of India.
(b) *Brachycephalic* is used to denote people with broad, rather than long skulls. Its opposite is *Dolichocephalic*, while the intermediate is called *Mesocephalic*.
(c) The *Alpine* type is frequent in much of Central Europe and is found throughout the European continent and Western/Central Asia. Alpines have broad skulls, brown hair and eyes that are sometimes dark, sometimes light. Their face tends to be broad, and their body build more stocky than Mediterraneans.
(d) The *Nordic* type is common in Northern Europe. It is similar to the Mediterranean type in appearance, but has blonde straight hair, light eyes and a usually narrower face and a higher forehead. The inhabitants of Sweden and Holland are usually Nordic.
(e) The *Dinaric* type has a long face, long beaky nose and a short skull. It is thus, brachycephalic, but differs from the Alpine type in its facial form and also in its body build which is tall and lean.
(f) Day [44] alleges that Manzelli miscalculates and that yellow hair is actually 7% of the total. In either case, the figure is very low, and perhaps strikingly close to the 4-6% figure of "Nordic-like" individuals in modern Greece [10].

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